

Magazine Feature Section

CORRUPT BUT NOT CONTENTED

Municipal Votes In Two Cities Have Demonstrated That the Proverbial "Pull" Of Ward Heelers No Longer Is So Effective—More Care Now Used In Selecting Men For Office

Students of municipal politics all over the country recently have found food for thought in the cases at Terra Haute, Ind., and St. Louis, Mo., where the highest officers, who had just been elected, now are serving penitentiary sentences.

The thought is that while corruption is being stamped out, the dispatch with which convictions were obtained gives ground for greater hope for the future.

It has been shown that municipal voters no longer are content under corruption.

Though greater care might have been exercised in electing fit men to office, the convictions immediately after election demonstrated that there is an element of voters keenly alert and determined to keep the offices clean. The penitentiary aftermath was due to the efforts of voters' leagues during what at first appeared to be "losing" campaigns.

Punishment was meted out to the offenders much more quickly than would have been possible a few years ago. It has been proven that the mighty "pull" of the ward heeler is giving way to the force of an awakening public sentiment on the moral fitness of men for office.

At Terra Haute twenty-one officials including Mayor Donn M. Roberts, Circuit Judge Eli M. Redman and Sheriff Dennis Shea received sentences to the Leavenworth penitentiary for election frauds.

The last chapter in one of the greatest exposes that any city of the United States has experienced, was written when A. H. Frederick, who 18 days before had been elected president of the St. Louis Board of Aldermen, the second highest position that the city could confer, pleaded guilty to forgery in the first degree, accepted a sentence of ten years in the penitentiary and two hours later departed for the penitentiary at Jefferson City to serve out his sentence.

Following closely on the heels of the Herre Haute, Ind., scandal, in which the mayor and practically all the city officials were convicted and sent by private train to the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, the St. Louis scandal is one of the greatest of the present day, involving as it does a man who three weeks before was elected to the second highest office in the city and who today is a convict, numbered and wearing prison garb and incarcerated with other prisoners in the Missouri penitentiary.

Broken in spirit and but a shadow of the former real estate dealer, financier and politician who carried on a vigorous campaign for head of the Board of Aldermen, A. H. Frederick, under four indictments for forging deeds of trust, entered his plea of guilty and within two hours was on his way to prison. He entered the court supported by two attorneys. He was haggard and emaciated and was hardly able to say that one word "Guilty" that in a minute transformed him from one of the leading men in the city to a convict.

Aged already by worry over financial deals and rendered almost a shadow of his former self by exposure after exposure that branded the man, who had the confidence of 150,000 voters of the city in his integrity, as a robber of widows, it seemed as if a life sentence were being imposed on this unfortunate, 57 years old, as he heard the judge read: "On your plea of guilty I sentence you to ten years in the penitentiary."

PROSECUTOR AMAZED.

"My God that such a thing should happen to a man," remarked the Circuit Attorney as he saw the former real estate dealer led away by a deputy sheriff. Frederick already had bid goodbye to his wife and when he appeared to plead guilty was ready to start out to serve his prison term, although friends predicted that because of his

age he would not return alive unless there was a parole.

The Frederick scandal not only resulted in the indictment of two more real estate men in the city of St. Louis but the bottom fell out of the real estate market for the time. All of which came on the heels of an exposure in which a member of the Board of Education of St. Louis was indicted on a charge of having become interested in a real estate transaction whereby on his tip real estate operators purchased a high school site and a few days later sold it to the Board of Education at a profit of \$11,500, which sum was divided among the principals.

The alert newspapers turned up the Board of Education scandal and while it was being thoroughly aired, civic leaders learned that Frederick, candidate for president of the Board of Aldermen, had been involved in two irregular transactions with banks in which he was accused of putting up forged deeds of trust as collateral for loans and in which he was compelled to make hasty restitution of principal and interest of the loan.

The banks refused to give the details and political leaders shielded their chief candidate. The exposure coming before the municipal election of April 6 may have carried the entire ticket to defeat. Each newspaper was morally certain that there had been a "crooked" deal but the character of the man was so well established in the town, so many thousands of people had strict confidence in him and had turned over practically all their savings for him to invest, that no newspaper dared the risk of an exposure and a subsequent libel suit.

EXPOSURE BREAKS.

Several days after the election in which Frederick was chosen head of the Board of Aldermen by a large vote over his opponent, Francis M. Curlee, the newspapers dared print that Frederick had left town and that he probably would never take office. One paper told of a secret meeting at a prominent club on the night before election at which Frederick was required to explain his real estate transactions to the satisfaction of party leaders and assure them there had been nothing irregular.

The next exposure revealed that Frederick had written his resignation as president of the Board of Aldermen even before he was elected and had given it to a bank which had discovered his irregular dealings with deeds of trust. At the same time a widow went to the Recorder of Deeds office and presented her deed for examination to learn it was a duplicate or forged one and that the deed on the property had been released several years ago. The storm gates of publicity were opened and Frederick was caught and crushed in the flood. Many other alleged fraudulent deeds of trust were discovered and the city for the time was "deed mad." Every person holding such security as a deed of trust on a loan rushed to the title examiners to have the deed "run down."

A bank panic could have created no more excitement.

Frederick, who a week before had been chosen the second highest official in the city by a trusting public, returned to the city a broken man and it was verified he attempted to kill himself on a train en route from Chicago. He barricaded himself in his home and the handsome residence was besieged by reporters and newspaper photographers.

The Grand Jury started an investigation and detectives were sent to the Frederick home to guard him. From the time of their arrival until he was released under heavy bond next day, he was a prisoner too ill to be taken to police headquarters.

He issued a public statement in which he asked that judgment be suspended, that every cent would be repaid, and in which he said he never would take office. A few days later his first resignation given the bank and a second one made out to the mayor were filed with the City Register and accepted by the Mayor.

After the first revelation in which several widows claimed they were swindled of their entire possessions by Frederick, a woman with a recently received inheritance was advised to invest through Frederick. He took her to a machine and showed her a handsome home in the residence section. She loaned him \$3,500 and took a deed of trust. When the expose of his business methods came the woman went to her safety deposit vault to examine her deed and found it was on a joining property. She went to the



A.H. FREDERICK, CHEERED BY HIS ATTORNEY, ON WAY TO PRISON



location and found her deed was on a vacant lot covered with tin cans and that the property was in her opinion and that of her real estate adviser, worth about \$500 or even less. He had borrowed \$100 beside the \$3,500, this widow said. Frederick, an investigation showed, had covered this bit of attempted high finance by even giving the widow fire and tornado insurance on the vacant lot.

While this investigation was on reporters learned that Charles C. Crone, an eminent real estate operator, had been involved in the sale of a fraudulent deed of trust for \$10,000 in handling an estate, which he did. While this happened in 1909 the exposure of it brought to light a fraudulent deed of trust for \$2,000 given the St. Louis Medical Society. Doctors called Crone on the transaction and although he made restitution, photographs of the signatures on the forged deeds were taken to be presented to the Grand Jury.

Further investigations brought to light more alleged fraudulent deeds, among them several given a widow. Her husband, a policeman, had been killed by two bandits he was searching for weapons. The police board had given her \$2,000 from the death benefit fund and \$1,000 representing her husband's full year's salary.

Keeping the Sabbath. Sir Archibald Geikie, the recipient of the Order of Merit, once told a story which illustrates one view of keeping the Sabbath in Scotland. Donald was mending a wheelbarrow at the bottom of his garden, and the noise shocked the Sabbath calm of the neighborhood. His wife came out with protestations: "Donald, mon, ye're making an awfu' row. What wull the neighbors think?" Donald went on nailing a board on the barrow.

Making Amends. Mrs. Housewife stalked indignantly into the baker's. "Those currant buns you sent me yesterday afternoon—" she began heatedly. "Nothing wrong, I hope, madam?" ventured the baker. "Yes, there is. One of them had a dead fly in it in place of a currant." "I'm most awfully sorry!" answered the baker earnestly. "I can't let a serious thing like this pass without doing something by way of reparation. If you will return me the fly, madam, I'll give you a currant in exchange!"

A Good Attendance. Sidney Smith, once entering a drawing room alone in a fashionable mansion in the west end of London, found it lined with mirrors on all four sides. Finding

himself reflected in every direction, he remarked: "Ah, I see. There appears to be a meeting of the clergy here and there seems to be a very respectable attendance!"

His Fear. A sad story is told by a Pennsylvania man of a lad in his town who, like many another boy, has been obliged to wear the cast-off clothing of his father. One afternoon this lad was discovered in tears. "What's the trouble, my boy?" asked the man who tells the story. "Why," explained the youngster, between sobs, "pop has gone and shaved his face clean, and now I s'pose I'll have to wear them red whiskers."

A Shrewd Boy. "Willie," whispered auntie, in the street car, "why don't you get up and give your seat to your father? Doesn't it pain you to see him reaching for the strap?" "Not in a car," responded the youngster, settling back comfortably in his seat.